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JOURNEY ALONG THE ROUTE OF A SHELTER BELT

V. V. Vil'yams

Professor V. V. Vil'yams, son of Academician V. R. Vil'yams, Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Chemistry and Soil Science of the Agricultural Academy imeni K. A. Timiryazev, toured the route of the state shelter belt running from Chapayevsk to Vladimirovka. Below, he describes his impressions.

We learned the route of the shelter belt in the city of Pugachev, Saratov Oblast. Here it was possible to meet all kinds of people taking part in the work of transforming the Volga steppes: engineers from the Urals, botanists from Leningrad, foresters from the Ukraine, and reclamation engineers from Tashkent.

Pugachev lies astride the green route running from Chapayevsk to Vladimirovka. The shelter belt, located between the Volga and Ural rivers, will be made up of several individual belts, 100-200 meters apart. Along its route forest conservation stations, equipped with a variety of the latest machines, are being established.

Workers from the Pugachev Forest Conservation Station took us into the steppe to the village of Porubezhka, 25 kilometers from Pugachev. Here they showed us the beginnings of the future tree belt -- young oaks, 30-40 to the square meter, planted in early spring according to the Lysenko nest method. Although little rain falls in this area, the oaks were growing well.

Students and scientists from the Timiryazev Academy are working along the route of the belt. They are compiling a detailed soil map which will be used for the technical planning work of the shelter belt. Soil samples, totaling about 1,500 per month, are sent to the Timiryazev laboratories in Moscow for chemical analysis. Pits are dug along the route so that soil layers may be studied; 16 pits 2 meters deep and one pit 4 meters deep are dug for each kilometer and the observations are recorded on the soil map. This information will enable the foresters to plant the right trees in the various soils.

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The soil scientist-forester team must give exhaustive information as to where the various kinds of trees and shrubs are to be planted. They have a wide choice of species: oak, birch, ash, small-leaf elm, ordinary elm, and Tatar maple trees; Siberian acacia, steppe cherry, tamarisk, narrow-leaf oleaster, Tatar honeysuckle, and golden currant shrubs.

Farther on, we came upon a silver oleaster belt planted 7 years ago. It stood more than 2 meters high and already represented a sturdy, compact hedge.

Along the approaches to the Caspian Sea area hot winds from Central Asia blow over the broad plains stretching out between the sea and the Ural River. These winds absorb the moisture from vegetation, soil, and river. In this area, there is a great variety of soils: dark chestnut soils alternate with those light chestnuts in color, and solonchak (saline), solonets (alkaline), and solod (acid) soils abound. Laying out a route for a shelter belt here is enormously difficult.

In Kazakhstan, the Dzhanybek Forest Conservation Station has field shelter belts planted 25 years ago under its care. These belts are made up of white poplar, small-leaf elm, oleaster, and Siberian acacia trees.

Northeast of Lake El'ton there is a 25-year old maple grove. The trees are well preserved and multiply by self-seeding.

The southernmost point of the shelter belt reaches the village of Uspenka, located in the area where an expedition headed by V. R. Vil'yams was active at the end of the last century.

It was there that tree planting was carried on for a number of years on a 145-hectare tract. In contrast, 280,000 hectares of trees have been planted during just the first year's operation of the Stalin plan for the transformation of nature.

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